

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PARIS 11956 01 OF 02 221755Z
ACTION EUR-12

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L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
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R 221741Z APR 77
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2043
INFO AMCONSUL BORDEAUX
AMCONSUL LYON
AMCONSUL MARSEILLE
AMCONSUL NICE
AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 11956

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, FR
SUBJECT: PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

SUMMARY. ONE OF THE MORE COMPLICATED ELECTION ISSUES
THE MAJORITY AND OPPOSITION PARTIES WILL FACE IN THE
NEXT WEEKS AND MONTHS IS THE VOTING PROCEDURE FOR
PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS. NO PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE COULD
HIT CLOSER TO HOME, AS THE DEPUTIES' OWN SEATS ARE AT
STAKE AND COULD WELL BE AFFECTED BY THE CHOICE BETWEEN
THE PRESENT "UNIT" SYSTEM -- WHICH IS MORE OR LESS THE
EQUIVALENT OF THE SYSTEM USED IN THE US -- AND PROPOR-
TIONAL REPRESENTATION (PR). WITH SO MUCH TALK ABOUT
PR IN THE AIR, IT IS LIKELY THAT AN INTERESTED DEPUTY
OR GROUP OF DEPUTIES WILL INTRODUCE A BILL IN PARLIAMENT
THIS SESSION OR IN THE FALL. THE POSITIONS OF THE VAR-
IOUS PARTIES ARE VERY NUANCED, BUT THE PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATE COULD GO FAR IN SMOKING OUT THEIR REAL INTEN-
TIONS. END SUMMARY.

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PAGE 02 PARIS 11956 01 OF 02 221755Z

1. PRIME MINISTER RAYMOND BARRE FOCUSSED NEW ATTENTION
ON SPECULATION ABOUT A CHANGE IN VOTING PROCEDURES WHEN
HE REMARKED DURING A TV INTERVIEW APRIL 19 THAT THE
QUESTION SHOULD BE STUDIED THOROUGHLY AND NOT BE THE
SUBJECT OF PRE-CONCEIVED DOGMATISM. THE PREVIOUS WEEK
THE RADICAL SOCIALISTS HAD FORMALLY ADOPTED A RESOLUTION
TO INTRODUCE SUCH A BILL IN PARLIAMENT, THE CDS REPEA-

TED ITS LONG-STANDING POSITION IN FAVOR OF PR AND INDEPENDENT REPUBLICAN GROUP LEADER ROGER CHINAUD HINTED STRONGLY THAT THE IDEA WAS WORTH CONSIDERATION. JUSTICE MINISTER ALAIN PEYREFITTE COMMENTED THAT SINGLE MAJORITY DISTRICTS WERE NOT AN INDELIBLE CHARACTERISTIC OF THE FIFTH REPUBLIC AND THAT DE GAULLE HAD EVEN TOLD HIM THAT VOTING PROCEDURES SHOULD BE OVERHAULED IN FRANCE EVERY 15 YEARS. GIVEN PEYREFITTE'S POSITION IN THE GOF, THIS COMMENTARY WAS TAKEN AS A SIGNAL OF GISCARD'S PRESENT THINKING.

2. THE SUBJECT IS COMPLICATED BY THE FACT THAT THERE IS LITTLE CONSENSUS WITHIN ANY PARTY ON THIS ISSUE, AND OPINIONS OFTEN TAKE A PERSONAL TURN, DEPENDING ON HOW ANY CHANGE WOULD AFFECT THE PARTICULAR DEPUTY'S CHANCES FOR REELECTION. IT IS FOR THIS REASON THAT EVEN SOME RADICAL SOCIALIST AND CDS DEPUTIES ARE AGAINST PR, WHILE SOME GAULLISTS ARE FOR. IN GENERAL, THE RATIONALE WITHIN THE MAJORITY FOR PR RUNS AS FOLLOWS:

- EACH PARTY WOULD HAVE A CHANCE TO GAIN ITS OWN REPRESENTATION, WITHOUT HAVING TO JOIN ONE OF THE TWO MAIN BLOCS. THE POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE WOULD THEN BECOME LESS TENSE THAN PRESENTLY THE CASE, AND PRESUMABLY FRANCE WOULD NO LONGER BE SPLIT IN TWO, SINCE SMALLER BUT NONETHELESS SIGNIFICANT PARTIES (I.E. THE CENTRISTS) WOULD HAVE THEIR OWN VOICE IN THE ASSEMBLY.

- A COROLLARY TO THE ABOVE, THE SOCIALIST PARTY (PS) AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY (PCF) WOULD NO LONGER BE OBLIGED TO STAY TOGETHER IN THEIR ALLIANCE. THE PS, CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 PARIS 11956 01 OF 02 221755Z

WHICH WOULD BECOME THE LARGEST PARTY IN FRANCE, WOULD BE FREE TO SEARCH IN THE CENTER FOR GOVERNMENT ALLIANCE.

- MAJORITY LOSSES WOULD BE MINIMIZED, COMPARED TO THE PRESENT SYSTEM.

3. THE RPR POSITION, WITH INDIVIDUAL EXCEPTIONS, SUMMARIZES THE DRAWBACKS OF SUCH A CHANGE AND ARGUMENTS AGAINST:

- BY DECIDING TO CUT ITS LOSSES AND CHANGE THE ELECTORAL LAW, THE MAJORITY WOULD IN SO MANY WORDS BE ADMITTING THAT DEFEAT IS INEVITABLE UNDER PRESENT PROCEDURES. RATHER THAN THE DEFEATISM THIS REFLECTS, A MORE WINNING STRATEGY WOULD BE TO STAND AND FIGHT.

- A CHANGE THIS LATE IN THE GAME (NEXT FALL FOR INSTANCE) WOULD BE SEEN AS AN ELECTION GIMMICK AND INCUR PUBLIC DISFAVOR FOR THOSE WHO VOTE FOR THE BILL.

- THE FIFTH REPUBLIC CONSTITUTION IS THE RPR'S SACRED COW, AND THE PARTY IS DEAD SET AGAINST ANY INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE WHICH MIGHT LEAD TO SUCH OTHER

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PAGE 01 PARIS 11956 02 OF 02 222038Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 PARIS 11956

CHANGES UNDER GISCARD'S INITIATIVE, OR TO A RETURN TO
FOURTH REPUBLIC POLITICAL INSTABILITY.

4. THE LEFT IS IN AS EQUALLY A DIFFICULT DILEMMA AS
THE MAJORITY OVER HOW TO REACT, SHOULD SUCH A BILL BE
INTRODUCED IN PARLIAMENT. THE LEFT IS IN PRINCIPLE FOR
PR, AND SUCH A POSITION IS CLEARLY SPELLED OUT IN THE
COMMON PROGRAM. HOWEVER DURING ANY DEBATE ON PR, THE
LEFT WOULD INSIST ON AN ACCOMPANYING RE-DISTRIBUTION OF
SEATS ACCORDING TO THE 1975 CENSUS IN ORDER TO RECOVER
WHATEVER SEATS IT MIGHT LOSE WERE PR INTRODUCED UNDER
THE CURRENT SYSTEM OF SEAT DISTRIBUTION. AT PRESENT, A
LEFT DEPUTY REPRESENTS APPROXIMATELY 20 PERCENT MORE
CONSTITUENTS THAN A MAJORITY DEPUTY. THEREFORE, IT
COULD ONLY STAND TO GAIN FROM A RE-DISTRIBUTION OF
SEATS BY A MORE EQUITABLE FORMULA. HOWEVER, THE
LEFT IS IN REALITY WORRIED ABOUT SOME OF THE SAME
POINTS IN PARA 2 ABOVE, WHICH ARGUE FOR PR WITHIN THE
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PAGE 02 PARIS 11956 02 OF 02 222038Z

MAJORITY. SO FAR, THE PS HAS GONE NO FURTHER THAN TO RESTATE ITS COMMON PROGRAM POSITION, ADD THAT IT WILL BE PREPARED TO DEBATE THE ISSUE IF RAISED IN PARLIAMENT AND THAT ITS VOTE WILL DEPEND ON THE CONTEXT AND EXACT LANGUAGE OF THE PROPOSAL. OUR GUESS IS THAT DOWN DEEP, THE PS WOULD RATHER STICK WITH THE PRESENT PROCEDURE WHICH IT FEELS IS WORKING FOR IT, UNLESS RE-DISTRIBUTION, WHICH THE MAJORITY WOULD NEVER ACCEPT, IS VOTED ALONG WITH IT. THE PCF, WHICH STANDS TO GAIN PROPORTIONALLY MORE THAN THE PS FROM PR, HAS HEDGED LESS THAN THE PS BUT HAS ALLOWED ITSELF ENOUGH ROOM TO DECIDE ITS VOTE AFTER THE EXPECTED PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE.

5. ALL THE PARTIES ARE GOING BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD TO REVISE THEIR CALCULATIONS ON THE POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF PR (SEPTEL). IN ALL PROBABILITY THERE WILL BE A PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE ON THE SUBJECT FOLLOWING A PROPOSAL INTRODUCED BY CENTRIST OR INDEPENDENT REPUBLICAN DEPUTIES. SINCE A VOTE CANNOT BE FORCED UNLESS THE GOF ACCEPTS THE PROPOSAL ON ITS PARLIAMENTARY CALENDAR, THE GOF'S REAL INTENTIONS WILL NOT BE MADE PUBLIC UNTIL THAT TIME. BUT ITS PRIVATE VIEWS ARE PROBABLY ALREADY CLEAR. PRIME MINISTER BARRE HAS TOLD ONE RECENT VISITOR THAT HE IS PERSONALLY IN FAVOR OF PR, AND ANOTHER HIGHLY-PLACED GOF OFFICIAL BELIEVES THE GOVERNMENT WILL PUT THE PROPOSAL ON ITS AGENDA NEXT FALL. TWO OTHER POSSIBILITIES ARE ALSO BEING DISCUSSED: A REFERENDUM ON PR AND A MIXED FORMULA, WHICH WOULD KEEP THE PRESENT 490 SEATS ELECTED BY THE CURRENT UNIT SYSTEM, BUT ADD 100 SEATS ELECTED NATIONALLY BY PR.

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